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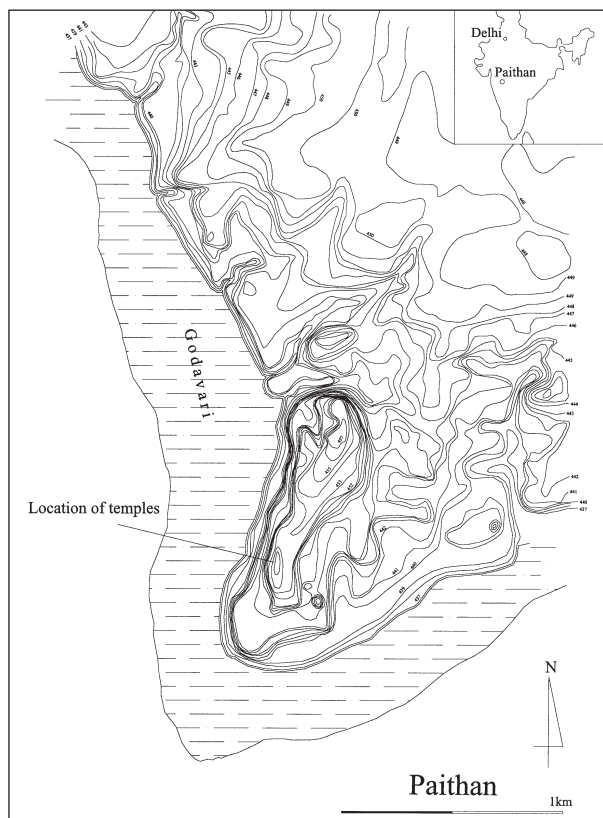
# Two Early Historic Brick Temples at Paithan in Maharashtra

D. KENNET and J.V.P. RAO

## Introduction

Between 1996 and 1999 the Archaeological Survey of India and the Society for South Asian Studies conducted joint excavations at the early historic and medieval site of Paithan in the Aurangabad District of Maharashtra.<sup>(1)</sup> Part of the work involved the cleaning and study of two early historic brick temples that were first excavated by Syed Yusuf in 1937 but which have never been fully recorded or published.

Whilst a full description and analysis must await the forthcoming final report,<sup>(2)</sup> this paper presents the most significant details of the plans and construction of the two temples and outlines their architectural development throughout the time that they were in use, which is believed to have been between approximately the 5th and the 8th century AD.



1. Map of Paithan showing location of the temples.

## Paithan

Paithan is to be identified with ancient Pratiṣṭhāna mentioned in Buddhist, Jaina, and Hindu literature and inscriptions as well as in European classical sources such as the Periplus. It was probably an urban centre of some importance from at least the 3rd century BC, and is believed by many scholars to have been the capital of the Sātavāhanas. Its importance continued into the Rāṣṭrakūṭa period and occupation of the town was probably more-or-less continuous until the present day (Morwanchikar 1985, pp. 1-39).

The archaeological site consists of a one-kilometre mound situated on a sharp curve in the Godavari about 60 kilometres south of Aurangabad (Fig. 1). Most of the site is now occupied by the modern town of Paithan; the temples are situated towards the southern extremity of the mound within an area protected by the Archaeological Survey of India.

## The temples

The two temples were first uncovered by Yusuf in 1937 (Yusuf 1938; 1939) (Fig. 2). They have survived the intervening 60 years without deteriorating significantly and are still preserved to a height of about 1.6 metres in some places. During the 1998 and 1999 seasons, detailed brick-by-brick plans were made of the two temples using an archaeological drawing frame (Fig. 3) and the construction of the temples was recorded in detail.

The temples stand next to each other separated by a narrowing passageway less than one metre wide. They are roughly similar in size and method of construction, but the orientation of the two temples is slightly different and there are also important differences in their plans and development.

## The North Temple

The North Temple consists of a square *garbhagrha* with a *maṇḍapa* to the east. The temple is oriented east-west and measures 11.3 m E/W and 7.64 m N/S. The temple is built entirely of bricks jointed with mud mortar. In a few places traces of lime mortar can be seen but these are almost certainly the result of a restoration in 1967. This is



2. Yusuf's 1937 photograph of the two brick temples (Yusuf 1938, pl.V).

confirmed by Yusuf's statement that no mortar was found on either of the buildings (Yusuf 1938, p. 4).

The temple can be divided into five distinct phases (I-V), which are described below and illustrated in Figs. 4 and 5.

#### Phase I

The earliest phase is believed to have consisted of a small, square shrine situated on a square, brick platform. Not much of this structure is visible as it has been largely concealed by the Phase II walls. The shrine now stands to a height of 1.1 metres (15 courses) and measures just over two metres along each side. The interior space measures just over a metre square. The walls of the shrine are of solid brick. At its north-east corner the shrine has been exposed by a later pit which reveals a simple recess in the third and fourth brick courses (Fig. 6 & 7). A feature such as this indicates that this wall was originally intended to be free-standing, rather than being an internal part of the Phase II wall as might have otherwise been presumed.

The shrine is situated on top of a square platform of similar construction which measures about 4.20 m along each side.

#### Phase II

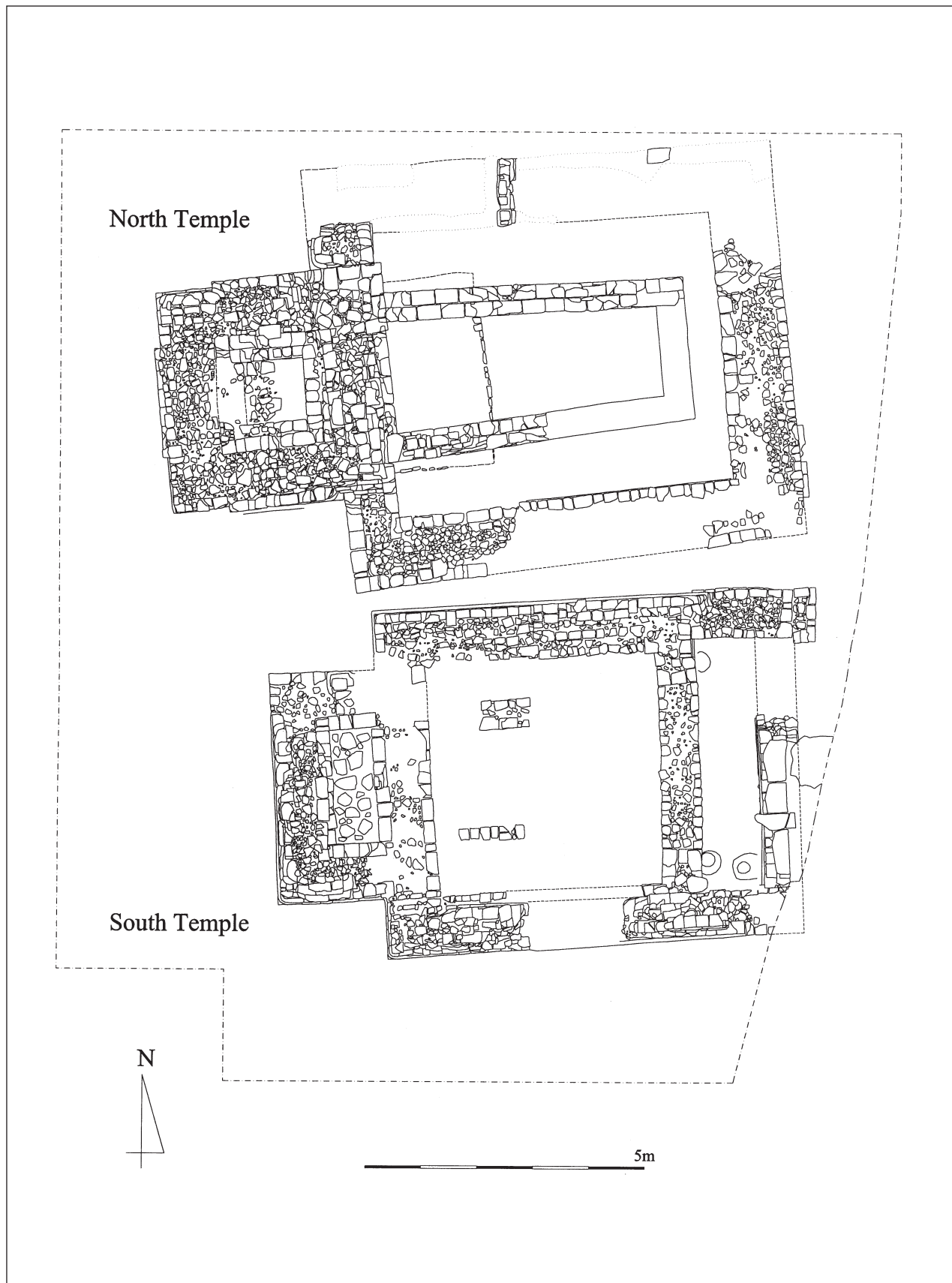
Phase II consists of a substantial brick structure that was built over Phase I, encasing the earlier shrine. The resulting structure was a square *mūlaprāsāda*, measuring about 4.2m along each side, with 10 cm projections along the central two metres of each face. The space between the outer wall and the walls of the Phase I shrine was filled with a hearting of brick bats and silt. Thirteen courses of Phase II are preserved on the south face, the lowest course resting directly upon the Phase I platform. The absence of evidence for adjoining buildings indicates that this was a free-standing structure.

The thickness of the walls and the design of Phase II suggest that it probably supported a *śikhara*.

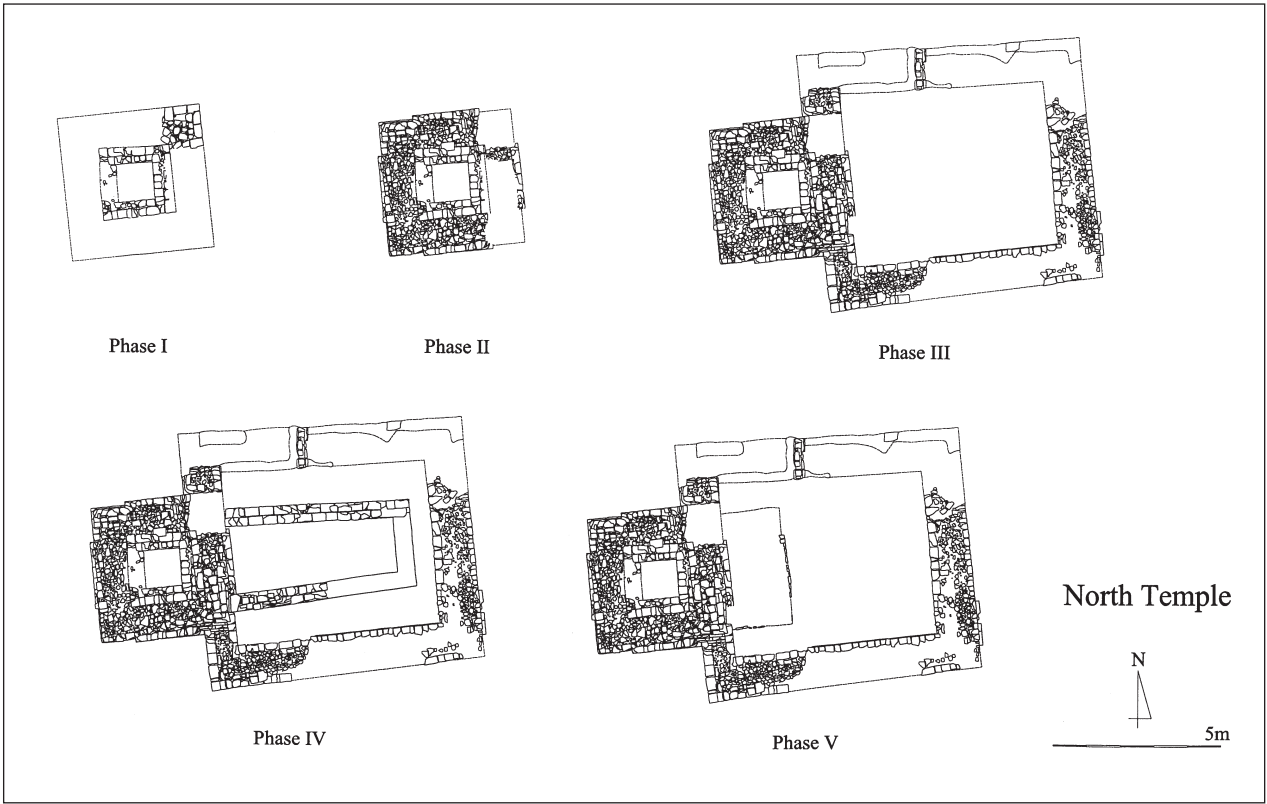
#### Phase III

Phase III denotes the addition of a *maṇḍapa* to the east of the Phase II structure. The *maṇḍapa* wall is 1.22 m thick, and encloses a space measuring 5.2 m N/S and about 6.06 m E/W.

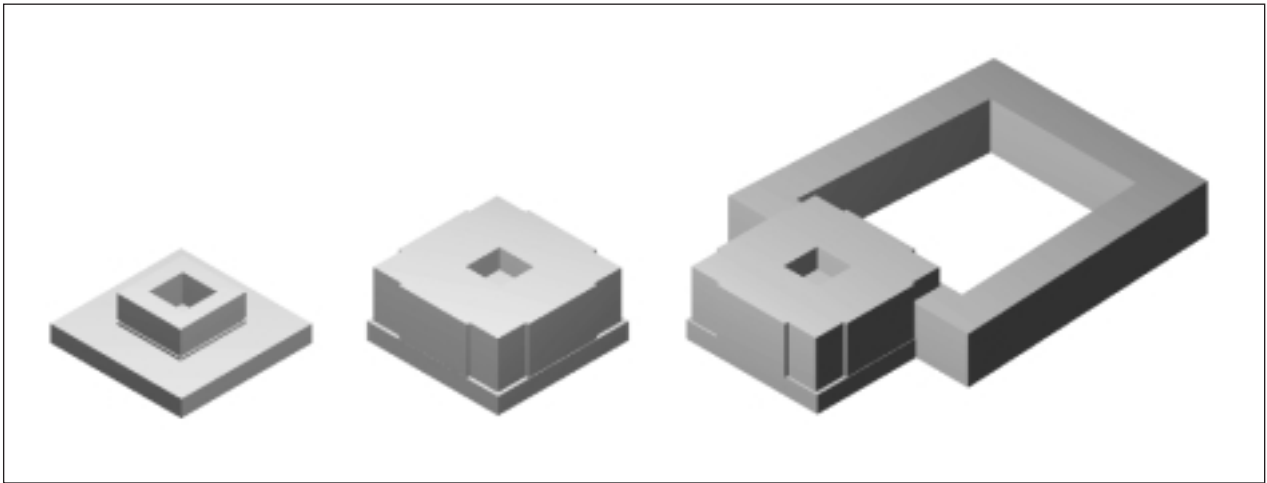
On the north side the *maṇḍapa* wall has been removed by later brick robbing, but the position of the original wall is discernible due to the preservation of the



3. The North and South Temples.



4. The phased development of the North Temple.



5. Three-dimensional reconstruction of Phases I, II and III of the North Temple.





6. Detail of Phase I of the North Temple wall and brick inset.

lowest course of mud mortar. The wall was constructed of bricks with a core of brick bats and silt.

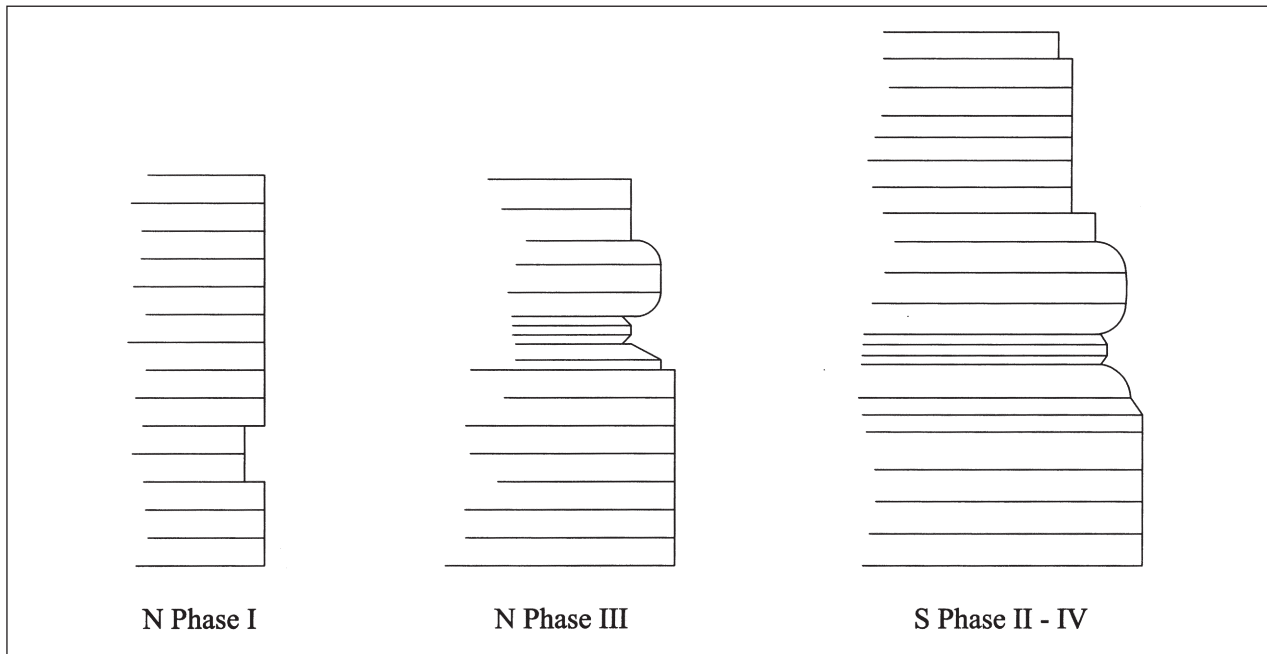
The only place where the *maṇḍapa* wall is preserved to a significant height is at its south-west corner where it abutts the eroded face of the Phase II structure. Here a short section of *adhiṣṭhāna* moulding is preserved. The moulding is very similar to the better-preserved moulding of Phase IV of the South Temple (below & Figs. 7 & 8). The moulding must originally have run around the outer face of the *maṇḍapa* wall.

Three aligned bricks were uncovered on the earthen floor of the *maṇḍapa* against the western end. They may have formed a base for a sculpture and indicate the use of this area for worship.

The addition of a *maṇḍapa* to the east of the earlier structures suggests that access to the Phase I and II structures was from this direction. However, the eastern wall of Phase II stands to a height of 14 courses and shows no trace of an opening. The original entrance can only have been in the now badly-preserved western wall, facing the river. It is therefore difficult to explain why the *maṇḍapa* was constructed on the eastern side. The most likely explanation is that a subsidiary deity in the rear wall of the Phase II structure had become the principle focus of worship by Phase III.

#### Phase IV

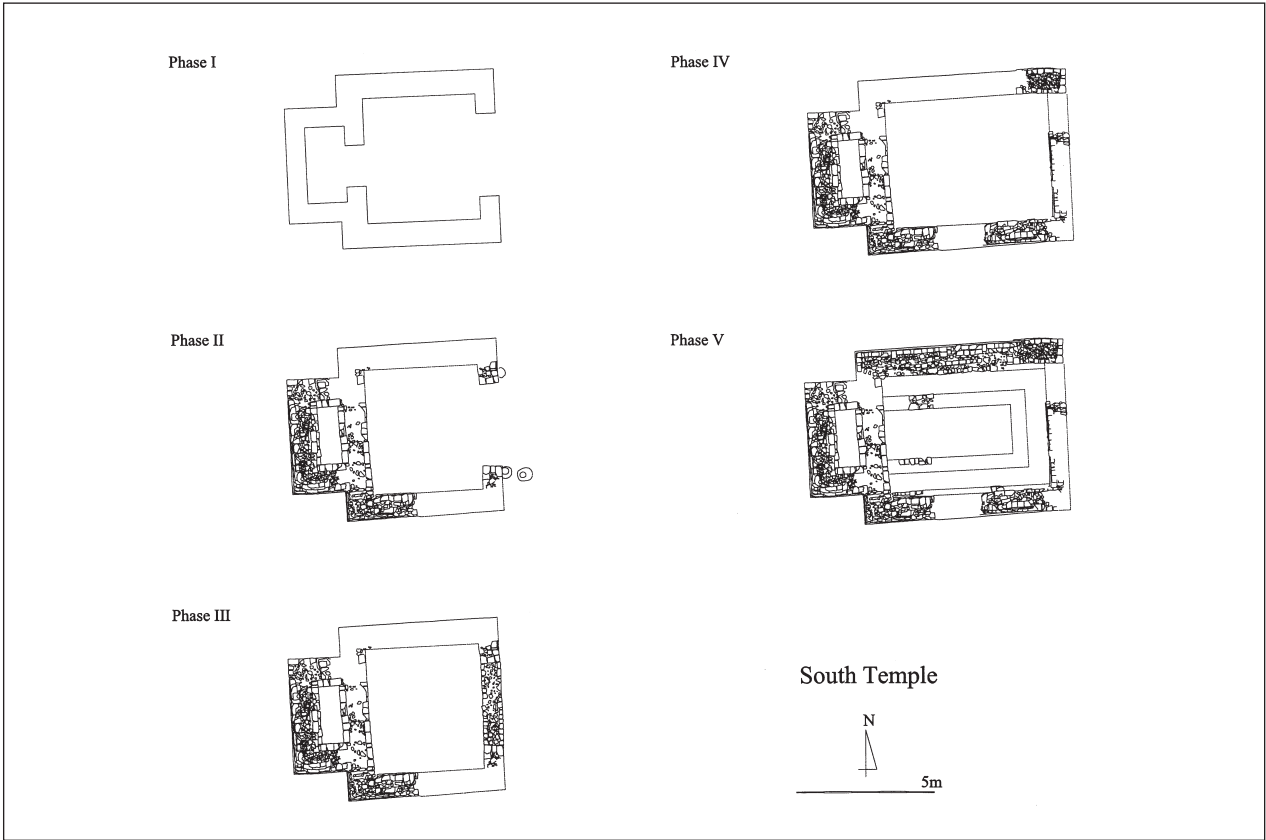
During Phase IV a wall was built within the *maṇḍapa* defining a trapezium and creating a narrow passageway between itself and the outer *maṇḍapa* wall. The base of the wall rests on the Phase III floors.



7. The *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings of the North and South temples.



8. The *adhishthāna* mouldings of the south wall of the South Temple.



9. The phased development of the South Temple.

The wall is about 0.52 m wide and consists of a double row of bricks with no rubble fill. The pointing is much cruder and the bricks are larger than the walls of Phases I to III. The Phase IV bricks measure 42/43 x 26 x 6.5 cm, whereas the bricks used in the first three phases measure 40 x 25 x 7 cm. The introduction of a new, larger brick size is useful for correlating the relative chronology of the North and South Temples (below).

#### Phase V

During Phase V a crude platform was constructed inside the *maṇḍapa* against its western end. It consists of a rectangle of up-ended brick-bats behind which black-cotton-soil has been piled. The platform measures 3.6 m by 1.8 m and is 20-30 cm high. In the middle of the platform a rectangular depression was noted, measuring 1.6 m by 0.92 m, which may have marked the location of a heavy object such as a stone sculpture. The Phase V platform was constructed over the remains of the Phase IV walls (Yusuf 1939:pl. XVIIb), but it is difficult to understand where the contemporary floor level was and it is likely that some relevant stratigraphic information was removed by Yusuf's excavations.

### The South Temple

The South Temple is located less than one metre from the North Temple on a slightly different orientation. It is entirely built of brick jointed with mud mortar. It consists of a rectangular *maṇḍapa* with a rectangular *garbhagr̥ha* at the west end. The overall dimensions of the temple are 9.40 metres E/W and 6.25 N/S. Five phases of construction can be defined, which are illustrated in Fig. 9.

#### Phase I

Phase I consists of a roughly square building measuring 6.24 m by 5.71 m. It was open to the east and had a rectangular *garbhagr̥ha* at the western end that measured 1.9 m by 4.14 m.

Phase I is not exposed in plan, but by cutting below the base of the Phase II walls it was possible to establish the presence of earlier walls. The type of construction is similar to that of the later walls and for the most part the wall thickness is identical. However, in the area around the *garbhagr̥ha* the Phase I walls are as much as 35 cm thinner, meaning that the space within the original *garbhagr̥ha* would have been 70 cm wider. During Phase I there was a 1.5 m wide opening joining the *garbhagr̥ha* and the *maṇḍapa*.

Only the foundation courses of the Phase I walls are preserved, indicating that the temple must have been extensively rebuilt at the end of the phase.

#### Phase II

Phase II follows the same plan as Phase I, the only difference is that the walls around the *garbhagr̥ha* are thicker than Phase I, and the opening between the *garbhagr̥ha*

and the *maṇḍapa* was closed up.

The eastern wall of Phases I and II had a three-metre-wide opening in it. Traces of *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings can be seen along part of the eastern walls either side of the opening, which are similar to the mouldings of Phase IV (below). These are now largely concealed by later walls but indicate that Phase II originally had mouldings around its outer face. Above the 13th or 14th course the Phase II walls were rebuilt, at least in part, after the addition of the Phase IV extension to the east (see below).

#### Phase III

In Phase III the eastern opening of the temple was closed up by a wall of a much cruder construction than the walls of Phases I and II. By this time the surface level of the temple had risen considerably since the original construction.

#### Phase IV

During Phase IV the eastern wall of the temple was demolished and the temple was extended to the east by 1.8 m. The Phase IV walls were of a cruder construction with thicker jointing than the Phase I and II walls. *Adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings are preserved on the western wall and at the eastern end of the south wall (Figs. 7 & 8). On the south wall the mouldings run above the joint between the Phase III and Phase IV walls, which only goes as high as the tenth course of bricks. The wall above the tenth course must therefore have been rebuilt at the time of the Phase IV extension. This is confirmed by the fact that the character of the brick masonry changes notably above this course. The *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings are similar to the section of moulding preserved in Phase III of the North Temple.

#### Phase V

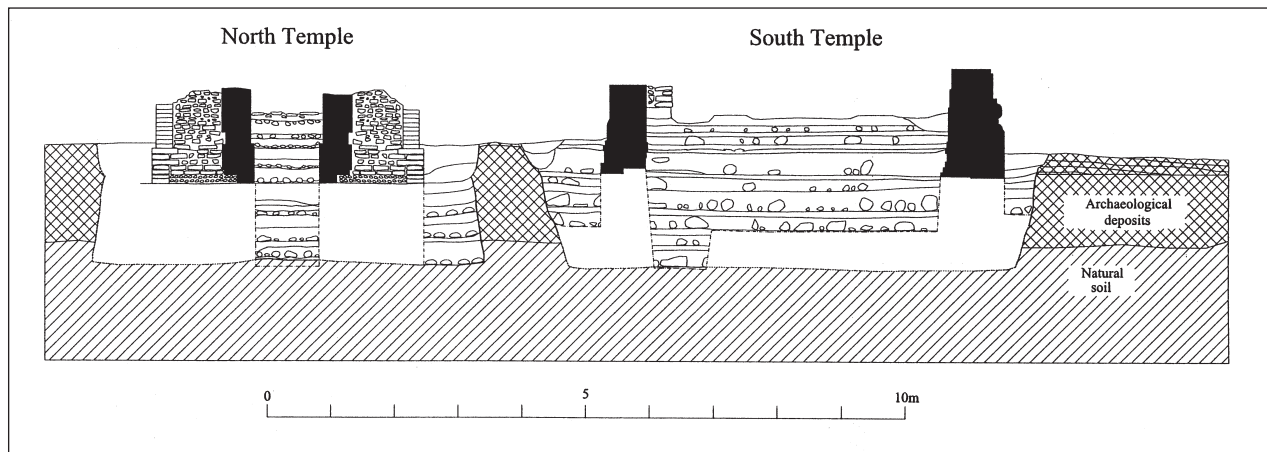
Phase V denotes the addition of internal walls that divide the *maṇḍapa* into three aisles. Although these walls are badly preserved in the South Temple, they seem to bear a close similarity to the walls of Phase IV of the North Temple and suggest a contemporary development.

In addition the southern and probably also the northern walls were crudely thickened on the interior face as a result of modifications to the interior of the temple in this phase.

### Foundations

Some of the most important information that came to light during the excavations relates to the foundations of the temples. In both cases the foundations are much more substantial than would normally be expected for domestic brick structures of a similar size. They consist of massive, vertically-sided rectangular pits, in each case slightly larger than the temple (Fig. 10). The foundation pits are two meters deep and are cut down to virgin soil. The foundation pits have been carefully back-filled with





10. A composite section through the two temples showing the foundation trenches and fills.

successive layers of boulders (up to about 30 cm) and pure silt, alternating with layers of compact pure silt. This sequence of layers was repeated five times before the walls were constructed on the uppermost level of compact silt. After the construction of the walls, a further sequence of four slightly thinner layers of boulders and silt were deposited within the temple before the floors were laid.

There is a slight difference between the nature of the foundations of the North and South Temples. The stones used in the North Temple are smaller and more angular, and the silt surrounding them seems to be less compact and less pure than that used in the South Temple.

It seems obvious that the rationale behind these very substantial foundations was ritual rather than structural. Indeed, it will be seen that the Paithan foundations follow the *Vāstu-Śāstra* literature precisely in all aspects. It is worth citing Kramrisch's compilation of the relevant sources to demonstrate this:

"in extent the foundation pit is coterminous with the boundaries of the *Prāsāda*; in depth it is equal to the height of man standing with raised arms, or it is dug to the rock-bottom or until gravel is reached or the water level according to the geographical conditions of the site. After the pit is dug, it should be filled with pure earth, eight finger widths (*angula*) high; on this layer another one is placed, one cubit in height and composed of layers of strong stones each embedded in wet earth and separated one from the other by sand and earth; when the foundation has been laid so far, it is moistened with water, trodden by elephants, and levelled with heavy wooden stampers. On top of this, it is firmly packed and when one fourth of the pit remains the first bricks are laid" (Kramrisch 1946i:105).

This also makes clear that there is significance in the fact that the Paithan foundations are cut down to natural soil, thereby reaching pure earth uncontaminated

with human artefacts.

No evidence of ritual offering was found beneath the *garbhagrha* of either temple, despite the fact that they were both completely excavated.

### Relative chronology

Both temples underwent five separate phases of development. Although the absolute dating evidence for these developments is still rather limited, it is possible to set out a relative chronology based on some aspects of the construction.

It has been noted above that the first three phases of the North Temple are built of bricks measuring 40 x 25 x 7 cm but Phase IV was constructed of larger bricks measuring 42/43 x 26 x 6.5 cm. The larger sized bricks were also used to construct Phase I of the South Temple and all later phases. This suggests that Phase I of the South Temple was constructed later than Phase III of the North Temple, after the introduction of a larger brick size.

Brick sizes do not indicate whether Phase IV of the North Temple was built before or after Phase I of the South Temple. However, the walls dividing the interior of the *maṇḍapa* in Phase IV of the North Temple are very similar to those of Phase V of the South Temple and are therefore likely to have been contemporary. In addition the *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings of Phase III of the North Temple are very similar to the mouldings of Phase IV of the South Temple. Based on these observations a relative chronology has been set out in Table 1.

### Absolute chronology

The absolute chronology of these structures and their sub-phases is problematic because almost all of the associated stratigraphic levels were removed without record by Yusuf's excavations. It is therefore not possible

Phase	Development	Proposed date
North Phase I	Simple shrine.	5th century or earlier
North Phase II	<i>Śikhara</i> construction.	mid 5th century
North Phase III	<i>Maṇḍapa</i> & <i>adhiṣṭhāna</i> mouldings.	late 6th or early 7th century
South Phase I	Change in brick size.	
South Phase II		
South Phase III		
South Phase IV		
North Phase IV & South Phase V	Interior walls subdivide <i>maṇḍapa</i> in both temples.	
North Phase V		
Abandonment		Later than the 8th century

**Table 1.** The proposed relative and absolute chronology of the two temples.

to link the dating evidence provided by coins, pottery, and carbon 14 samples from the present excavations to the construction and development of the two temples.

At the very broadest level the structures can be dated between the 4th and the 8th centuries AD, during which time the Hindu temple came into existence, but a more accurate chronology of the individual phases is required in order to situate them within an historical context. This can only be achieved through parallels between architectural elements of the Paithan temples and dated buildings elsewhere. There are four stages in the development of the two temples for which such parallels can be proposed:

1. The recess in the wall of Phase I of the North Temple appears to be a very early form of plinth moulding that can be compared to the deep recesses in the *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings of the Rudra-Narasimha, Bhōgarāma, and Kēvala-Narasimha temples at Rāmṭēk, the latter of which is dated to the 5th century by an inscription (Fig. 11) (Meister *et al.* 1988, pp. 66-70). A similar recess is also present in the earliest phase of the Kapotesvara temple at Chejerla (Fig. 12), which I. K. Sarma has dated to between the 2nd and the 4th century AD, although he does not specify the evidence for this (1982, pp. 138-9). The extreme simplicity of the Paithan moulding might suggest that Phase I of the North Temple should be dated to the early 5th century AD, or possibly somewhat earlier.

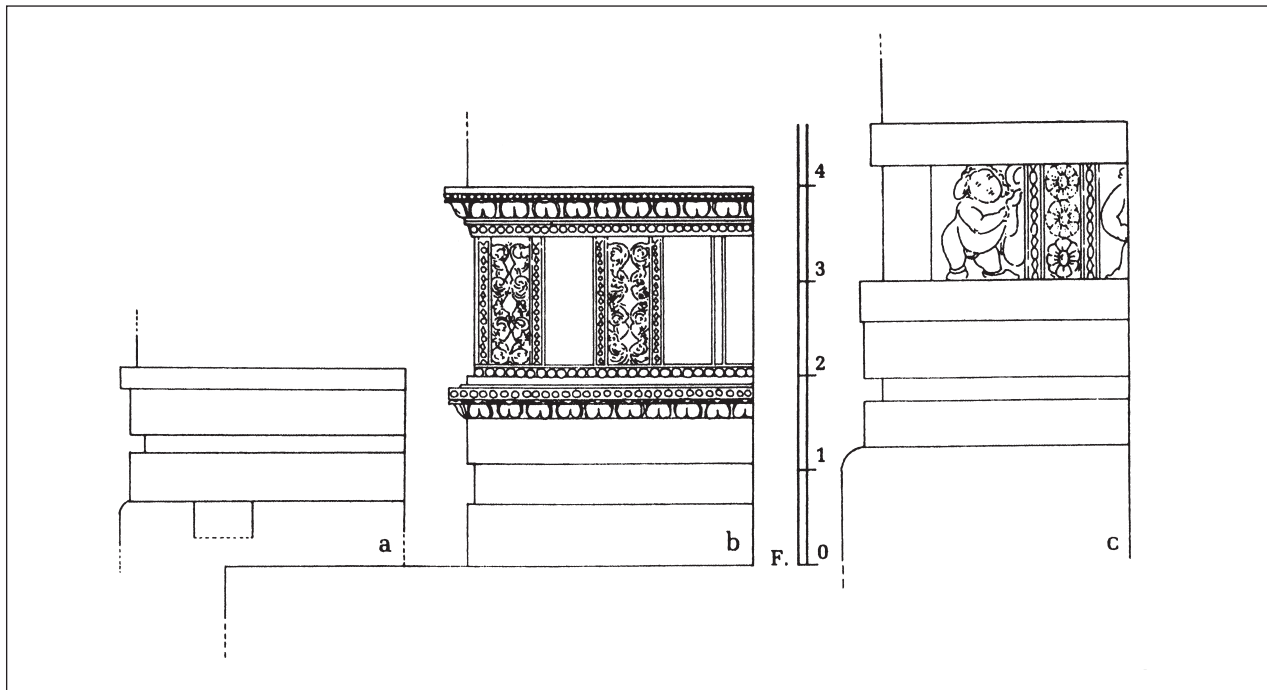
2. The thickened walls of Phase II of the North Temple were clearly intended to support a *śikhara* over the *garbhagṛha*. It has been suggested that the construction of *śikharas* is a stage of Gupta temple development that can be dated to about the middle of the 5th century on the basis of parallels with Bhītārgāñv, Dēvgadh and the brick temple at Bōdhgaya (Meister *et al.* 1988, p.23).

3. The *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings in the walls of North

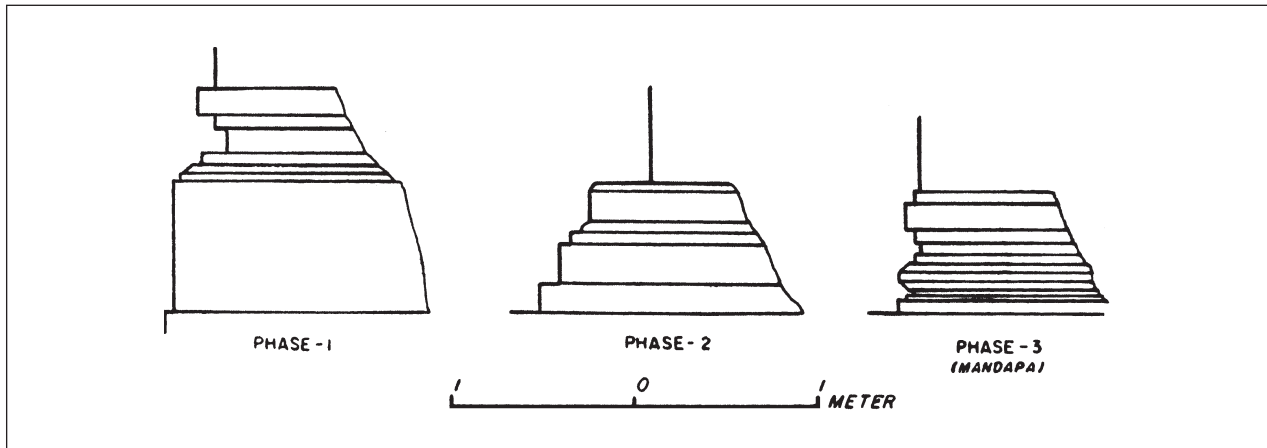
Phase III and South Phases II to IV are quite sophisticated. In North India the rounded *kumuda* (or *kalaśa*) commonly occurs on structures dated towards the end of the 5th century AD or later, such as Nacnā, Bhūmarā, Sākōr, Elephanta Cave 1 and the stupa in Ajanta Cave 26 (Meister *et al.* 1988, pp. 39-40, 52-54, 74-5, 90-1), whilst it does not appear to occur on structures built earlier than about 475 AD such as Bhītārgāñv, Kuṇḍā, Tigawā, Bhitārī and Darrā (Meister *et al.* 1988, pp. 30-32, 35-37). However, this serves only as a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the *maṇḍapa* walls — the Paithan mouldings could have been built considerably later, because similar rounded *kumudas* continued to be built after this time. It is difficult to date the Paithan mouldings more accurately than this as the detailed scheme of development of *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings has not yet been fully elucidated in North India.

4. The addition of a *maṇḍapa* to the *mūlaprāsāda* in Phase III of the North Temple can also be dated. It could be said that the earliest known *maṇḍapas* are the *gūḍhamāṇḍapas* on the Rudra-Narasimha and Kēvala-Narasimha temples at Rāmṭēk but these are quite particular, as they are part of the same structure as the *sāndhāra garbhagṛha*, and can therefore be ignored as relevant parallels. The first *maṇḍapas* that resemble Phase III of the North Temple at Paithan, by having the *maṇḍapa* more clearly separate from the *mūlaprāsāda*, first occur at the end of the 6th or the early 7th century on temples such as the Lakṣmaṇa and Rāma temples at Sirpur, the Rājīvalōcana temple at Rājīm, and the Paraśurāmēśvara, Mōhinī, and Uttarēśvara temples at Bhuvanēśvara (Meister *et al.* 1988, pp. 230-236, 256-260, 265-267) in North India. In the Kārṇāṭa-Drāviḍa tradition the same feature began to develop in the later 7th and early 8th centuries (Hardy 1995, pp. 67, 71, fig. 46).

The final abandonment of the Paithan temples cannot be dated accurately, but it is thought to have



11. Plinth mouldings from Rāmtēk: a. Rudra-Narasimha temple; b. Kēvala-Narasimha temple; c. Bhōgarāma temple. Scale in feet. After Meister *et al.* 1988, fig. 30.



12. Adhiṣṭhāna mouldings on the main temple at Chejerla phases I, 2 and 3 (from Sarma 1982, fig. 18).

occurred after the 8th century because pottery of approximately this date was found in the surrounding areas of Yusuf's trench.

The proposed dating described above is incorporated into Table 1 to give a dated summary of the development of the two buildings.

### Discussion

These structures are a useful contribution to our knowledge because very little is known about brick temples of this date in Maharashtra. They were clearly modest structures of only local importance, but

nonetheless they provide a useful insight into the development of temple architecture during this period. In the North Temple we can trace the growth from a simple shrine — with a roof of unknown shape — in the 4th or 5th century, through the construction of a *śikhara* in the middle of the 5th century, towards a larger and more complex structure incorporating a *maṇḍapa* with *adhiṣṭhāna* mouldings in the late 6th or early 7th century.

The South Temple, which was constructed after Phase III of the North Temple, did not undergo the same development. When the South Temple was constructed, probably in the early 7th century, it was built with a *maṇḍapa*. The changes that occurred to the South Temple

in Phases II to V represent relatively minor enlargements and re-buildings, as well as some repair and maintenance, rather than a complete re-organisation.

It is therefore the development of the North Building that is the most interesting. Its growth from a small *mūlaprāsāda* into a larger temple illustrates a pattern of development that is well known to have occurred in temple architecture generally, but which has never before been demonstrated in the phasing of a single building (Pichard 1994, chapter 2, fig. 4. Hardy 1995, chapter 4). Why the North Temple should have grown in this way is a question that cannot yet be answered. It seems quite possible, however, that the small Phase I shrine housed a relatively minor deity whose local importance attracted patronage and thereby grew in stature throughout the 5th and 6th centuries.

The brickwork in the later phases of both structures is rather crude and shows a definite decline in quality, perhaps suggesting a degree of degeneration or impoverishment in the 8th century or later. It is unfortunate that the layers related to the use of the temples at this time have completely disappeared.

- Yusuf, Syed, 1938, *Paithan Excavations*. *Indian Art and Letters* vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 1-7 (reprinted by The India Society).  
 — 1939, *Paithan Excavations*. *Annual Report of the Archaeological Department of His Exalted Highness The Nizam's Dominions* 1346 F. (1936/37 AC): Appendix C 39-42.

## NOTES

1. The team consisted of the two authors assisted by G.L. Gaikwad, Goutham Haldar, Dr. M. Kasturi Bai, and Manoj Kumar Saxena (ASI), and E. Eastaugh, J. Martin, L. Lloyd-Smith, N. Perchard, and N. Wells (SSAS). The authors would like to record their thanks to Shri Ajay Shanker and Mrs. Komal Anand (Directors General, ASI), Shri S.B. Mathur (Additional Director General, ASI), Dr. R. S. Bisht (Director E&E, ASI), Shri S.V. Venkateshaiah (S.A. Aurangabad Circle, ASI), Mr Colin Perchard (Minster Cultural Affairs, British Council), James Howell and Michael Willis (SSAS), Chandrika Grover (British Council) and the people of Paithan.
2. To be published in the *Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India*.

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